

## Helping your community help small businesses

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**ERICH:** Businesses in Washington state are often befuddled by all the requirements they face from state and local governments, especially when it comes to dealing with hazardous waste. Fortunately, the state Department of Ecology created the Pollution Prevention Assistance program to help businesses and other organizations partner with local authorities to ensure they're effectively and efficiently meeting all their obligations. The program operates in various locations across the state, but it's about to get a little bit bigger. Joining me now to talk about the PPA program is Elaine Snouwaert, who coordinates the statewide effort. Elaine, thanks for being here.

**ELAINE:** Thanks for having me.

**ERICH:** Tell me, what is the Pollution Prevention Assistance program?

**ELAINE:** Well, the Pollution Prevention Assistance program, also abbreviated as PPA, is a partnership of local agencies that provides technical and financial assistance to businesses – and those are primarily small businesses. So, the Department of Ecology coordinates this program by providing funding, training, and other resources to local partner agencies, and then our partners help businesses address potential pollution and other environmental and safety concerns by recommending best management practices. Our primary focus is on managing hazardous waste safely, reducing toxic chemical use, and ensuring that all pollutants stay out of stormwater. The recommendations that are provided by our partners can help businesses stay in compliance with environmental regulations, contribute to safer working environments for their employees, and can sometimes even help them save money.

**ERICH:** So this program was originally called Local Source Control...tell me about the history of this and how it evolved into PPE.

**ELAINE:** So in the beginning, the partnership got started in 2007 when the Washington State Legislature provided funding to start the Local Source Control program, or LSC. And essentially, the idea behind that was to control pollution at the source and to do it locally. The funding was provided to Ecology, which we then passed through to the local entities to hire source control specialists who would visit businesses to look for potential pollution issues and provide solutions to these issues. But then in 2016, LSC was rebranded to the Pollution Prevention Assistance program with the hope that this name better described what we do and better emphasized our broader mission and approach.

**ERICH:** That makes sense. What are some of the successes that the PPA has seen in recent years?

**ELAINE:** Well, a lot of small successes every day. You know, our partners are out there visiting businesses, finding the little things that can add up to bigger problems. That's what creates the big win, the big success for this. The first business visits began in early 2008, and since that time our partners have made approximately 40,000 visits and have found an equal number of pollution issues. Often through simple and sometimes creative solutions, they have resolved about 95% of them. So collectively, that is a major success for pollution prevention. We've also had some big successes in recent years, too, primarily around the growth of our services. Since 2018, we have added seven new cities and counties to the partnership, meaning that our services are more readily available to businesses across the state, and we are still getting interest from others to join. And about five of those

new cities and counties that I mentioned actually are just joining this year. And then in 2019, we also received funding from the Legislature start the Product Replacement Program. Through this program, PPA partners and Ecology are able to offer financial assistance to switch to safer products and technology, and over the last two years, we have helped over 50 dry cleaners transition to safer cleaning technologies.

**ERICH:** And we just did a podcast with the Product Replacement Program coordinator, so feel free to look in the Department of Ecology's blog archive for that audio. Getting back to the PPA, I know it's requesting support to expand further across the state. Tell me about that effort.

**ELAINE:** Well, when the partnership originally formed it was aimed at addressing toxics in specific urban water bodies; those were the Duwamish River, Commencement Bay, and the Spokane River. So our partner agencies have been concentrated in these areas. And then we expanded to Clark County in 2015, but we continue to have very little coverage east of the Cascades, and we want to change that. So at Ecology, we believed in the importance of ensuring our services are available all across the state. So our request to expand the PPA partnership is essentially a request to improve access to our technical assistance by providing support to new jurisdictions in Eastern Washington.

**ERICH:** With the expansion to Eastern Washington does the effort stop there or does the future look even broader for the PPA in the next 5 to 10 years?

**ELAINE:** We're hoping to have a much more equitable distribution of partner agencies across the state. You know, at Ecology, we can provide this same type of technical and financial assistance to businesses anywhere in the state, but we'd much rather see it come from local and city PPA specialists working in their community. And that harkens back to the whole original concept of local source control. We would like that assistance to come from the local community. We currently have a PPA partnership in about half of the western Washington counties, so ideally we will approach that in eastern Washington in the next five to 10 years. But that's not to say that if we had interest from one of the uncovered areas in western Washington, we wouldn't also consider that if we had the funding available to do so.

**ERICH:** So someday, your vision is that any business in Washington state that produces hazardous waste should be able to reach out to their local Pollution Prevention Assistance partner to get assistance with disposing of properly that waste, right?

**ELAINE:** That is correct.

**ERICH:** So if I'm a local business and I'm hearing this interview, do I contact the Department of Ecology or do I contact my local authorities?

**ELAINE:** You can do both. You can contact Ecology, and we have a website where we can find your local partner, or you can reach out to your local jurisdiction to see if they are part of this partnership and can provide services.

**ERICH:** Anything else you think the public should know about the PPA?

**ELAINE:** Well, I can tell you that our PPA partners are passionate about helping businesses address potential environmental issues in ways that work for the businesses. And you can find out more about our PPA partnership at our website at [ecology.wa.gov/PPA](http://ecology.wa.gov/PPA), and you can check to see if there is already a local partner where you work and live.

**ERICH:** Very good. Elaine Snouwaert, coordinator of the statewide Pollution Prevention Assistance program, thank you for speaking with me.

**ELAINE:** Yeah, thanks for having me.